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June 3, 2021

Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20016  
Dear Secretary, Mayorkas:

I appreciate the difficult balance the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) struck between public health concerns and social and economic equities during the course of the pandemic. As we enter the fifteenth full month of restrictions and vaccines become widely available on both sides of the border, it is critical that DHS develop a plan to resume non-essential travel at land ports of entry and communicate this plan to local stakeholders in border communities.

Cities and counties across the 15<sup>th</sup> District of Texas have experienced revenue losses since the onset of the pandemic but those along the border have borne even higher economic and social costs as a result of these travel restrictions. Our families, friends, and businesses lead a cross-border lifestyle. The Rio Grande Valley is a piece of a larger region that can be described as a “border plex” in which the populations on both sides of the border positively increase the economy of the entire region. Pre-pandemic, Mexican citizens who made short day trips to the United States to shop accounted for an outsized share of the local economy in our communities. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas estimates that 30 to 40 percent of border cities’, such as McAllen, Texas, retail activity was attributable to Mexican Nationals.<sup>1</sup> Data from the Central Bank of Mexico indicates that the United States has historically run a surplus in cross-border shopping with Mexico, meaning that Mexican citizens typically spend more in the United States than U.S. citizens spend in Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic has been difficult for all of us and was uniquely devastating for South Texas. Many loved ones were lost to COVID-19 and, while the economic impacts of businesses and borders closing were difficult, they were necessary. However, the circumstances have changed significantly. As we continue making strides toward normalcy, we must begin to forge a path to pre-pandemic operations at our land ports of entry. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccinated individuals are capable of carrying on a majority of day-to-day activities that are directly associated with positive economic behavior, including retail shopping. Thankfully, along the border region within my congressional district, over 40% of the Rio Grande Valley population is fully vaccinated and with that number increasing every day.

With the health of South Texans remaining my top priority, I respectfully request that DHS provide a written response detailing a clear path forward for safely reopening. Such a response will:

1. Provide details on any cost-benefit analysis DHS has done when deciding to extend existing travel restrictions or impose new restrictions along the southwest border.
2. Provide the data used by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to specifically determine peak “non-essential” travel days and times at ports of entry.
3. Develop and publicly articulate a detailed plan, including benchmarks that must be reached, for land ports of entry along the southwest border to return to normal operations.
4. In consultation with local stakeholders—both “essential” and “non-essential”—develop a strategy to effectively communicate any changes to DHS travel restrictions with these groups.

I appreciate the hard work the Department of Homeland Security has undertaken to protect Americans’ safety during this unprecedented pandemic and public health crisis. I remain committed to ensuring that DHS and CBP have the necessary resources to protect the health of the public and agency staff and look forward to continuing to work with you recover stronger than ever from the COVID-19 threat.

Sincerely,

Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'VGMA', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress